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ABSTRACT

Following a brief discussion of what is currently being taught in social studies, the major propositions of a radical perspective that has emerged among academics are examined. According to the radical perspective, the ultimate social ideal and the purpose of education is the emancipation of all people. Social studies should concentrate on ideas emphasizing the significance of dominant interests, struggles for autonomy, contradictions, and the social construction of knowledge. Education should generate action toward emancipation. Strengths of this radical perspective include educational objectives that stress long-term social goals, immediate personal agency, cooperative discourse, and an approach to reform that respects the culture of local teachers and students. Weaknesses of the perspective include its ideological substance; relative silence about pedogogy for dealing with ambiguity, contradiction, and criticism; and neglect of organizational constraints on teaching. Intellectual work and research necessary to resolve concerns that mainstream educators have with the radical perspective include conveying a coherent vision of the social alternatives to be pursued, examining how structures of schooling might be revised, and identifying teaching approaches that guide encounters with ambiguity, contradiction, and criticism. (RM)

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Social Studies in U.S. Schools: Mainstream Practice and Radical Potential

by

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SO 015 784

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To describe social studies education, one can discuss what is taught in schools, but also on what is happening among academics who write about what is taught in schools. This paper does both. First, I recapitulate the conclusions of several studies that generalize about what is taught in U.S. schools. Next I consider the strengths and weaknesses of a radical perspective, a significant body of thought that has emerged among academics within the last several years, but which has not been developed into a curriculum plan for social studies and which has received almost no formal scrutiny from teachers or social studies academics in the mainstream. Finally, I suggest an agenda for inquiry that must be undertaken if potentially appealing aspects of the radical perspective are to be incorporated into social studies teaching. The analysis invites educators to address some key issues to prevent further entrenchment of unfortunate trends that several current calls for reform in the U.S. are likely to perpetuate.

I. The Mainstream

U.S. citizens take pride in local control of education, and researchers confirm considerable diversity between schools in demography and educational climate, but the topics that students study in social studies, the sequence in which they occur, and teaching practices are remarkably similar throughout the country. This modal pattern, or mainstream, has come about not through centralized political control, but apparently through unique historical events (such as recommendations from influential professional organizations, see Hertzberg, 1981), the politics and economics of textbook publishing (Fitzgerald, 1979), the effects of teaching students massed in large groups within bureaucratic structures (Bidwell, 1965); and the absence of debate on fundamental

issues of political-economic ideology in the society at large. There are countless exceptions to the summary below, but research to date reveals the following patterns in curriculum, teaching practices, and student learning.

A. Curriculum

Students attend public school for 13 years (kindergarten, grades 1-12) from age 5-18. Social studies topics typically introduced during those years are indicated in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Elementary grades 1-6 reflect the conception of "expanding communities": family, neighborhood, local community, state, region, nation and world. U.S. History is included at the 5th, 8th, and 11th grades. Through grade 8, students usually have few electives. In grades 9-12 (high school), students have more choice, but most take the pattern indicated through grade 11. Those who take four years of social studies in high school choose from the electives indicated for grade 12.

In lower elementary grades, social studies ranks among the lowest of the academic subjects in amount of school time: only about 2.8 hours per week (Goodlad, 1983, p. 133). In high school, however, social studies is prominent--exceeded only by English in the amount of school time. Most high school graduates take 3 or more years of social studies, (Owings and Brown, 1983), spending about 4 hours per week in class.

Table 1

Dominant Curriculum Patterns for
Social Studies

Kindergarten:	self, home, school, community
Grade 1:	Families
Grade 2:	Neighborhood
Grade 3:	Communities
Grade 4:	State History and Geography
Grade 5:	U.S. History
Grade 6:	World Cultures (Western or Eastern Hemisphere)
Grade 7:	World History, Cultures, Geography
Grade 8:	U.S. History
Grade 9:	Civics/Government or World Cultures/History
Grade 10:	World Cultures/History
Grade 11:	U.S. History
Grade 12:	American Government, Sociology, Psychology, Economics

Source: Lengel and Superka (1982)

This list of general topics gives virtually no information about teachers' goals or the specific knowledge, skills, and values they communicate to students. Teachers customarily describe their goals for students in terms of attitudes (respect for others, appreciation of democracy), skills (problem-solving, critical thinking), knowledge (understanding global interdependence or multiple causation in history), and citizenship behavior (active participation in community life, obeying the law). Critics claim that social studies teaching often has opposite effects: reinforcement of competition and self-interest rather than cooperation; inaccurate understanding of history; passivity, rather than active participation as a citizen. Unfortunately, space does not permit a more detailed account of the particular content actually taught in U.S. classrooms.

Social studies teachers are bombarded with a variety of proposals for curriculum change. In the recent past, topics such as global education, law-related education, environmental education, human relations education have been promoted by national organizations. Through publications, conferences, preparation of instructional materials, technical assistance to teachers and in several cases lobbying for legislation and funding, such groups have attempted to secure a firm place for their topics in school curriculum. Programs for high ability students such as Advanced Placement or the International Baccaulaureate are also available in history and other social sciences. Many schools supplement the mainstream program with special offerings, but surveys of social studies curriculum have not documented the actual extent of departures from the conventional sequence of subjects.

B. Teaching Practices

Instruction usually occurs in classes of about 20-30 students grouped according to age. For the most part, instruction is organized for the class as a whole; with students spending most of their time in activities directed at the full class group. Classes in the lower grades are frequently divided into small groups based on students' reading ability. In high school, students are often tracked into college preparatory or non-college classes. Teachers put more effort into and show more enthusiasm for high ability students. They also involve high ability students more frequently in tasks requiring higher order thinking (Rosenbaum, 1976; Goodlad, 1983).

Instruction is usually organized around a single textbook, as teachers lecture and assign worksheet activities based on the book. Teachers also guide student discussions, and arrange for student reports, simulation games, films and occasional field trips. Teachers in the early grades involve students more as active learners with diverse activities than teachers in the upper grades who rely almost exclusively on lecturing and recall of textbook material. Teachers in the early grades also spend more time in activities aimed at developing students' social skills (e.g. learning to speak in front of a group, working cooperatively within a group, getting along with others). High school teachers focus more on subject matter (Goodlad, 1983).

At all levels, teaching activities emphasize students' acquisition of factual information, the definition of terms, and skills such as reading maps, tables, using the resources of a library. Students spend relatively little time investigating the merits of alternative claims and theories of social life, carrying out their own social research,

applying content learned to their personal experiences, or analyzing social controversy (Shaver et al, 1978; Fancett and Hawke, 1982). Social knowledge is presented as authoritative, conclusive, rather than problematic or tentative.

Research on teachers' work, the way they think about it, and the "culture" of schooling indicates that these practices evolve not primarily because teachers consider them professionally ideal, but because they seem in many cases to be the most effective methods for coping with several organizational conditions of schooling. Such conditions include the assignment to teach large numbers of students in one group; teaching simultaneously students who differ substantially in ability, motivation and home support for school work; a credentialing and grading system which inhibits individualized instruction; lack of time for planning and collaboration with colleagues; escalating demands on the school to respond to such social issues as desegregation, instruction of non-English speaking students, support for students in the midst of family disruption, drug use, crime, pregnancy, etc. Studies by McNeil (1981), Metz (1982), Cusick (1983), and Sizer (1984); for example, indicate how teachers adapt to such contraints. Berlak and Berlak (1981) describe the kinds of dilemmas teachers face in making decisions about their teaching practices.

C. Student Learning

We cannot determine precisely what students learn from school-based social studies instruction in contrast to other educational influences (media, peer culture, family), but students' attitudes, skills, knowledge and social participation related to social studies have been surveyed in various studies.[1]

1. Attitudes

About 65% of the students at all grade levels say they like social studies, but only a minority (from 15%-35%) like the subject "very much," consider it "very interesting," or "difficult" (Goodlad, 1983, pp. 116, 232). Social studies ranked 8th among 16 subjects rated for importance, with 40 percent of the students in grades 7-12 rating it very important. In contrast, math and English were rated very important by 80% and 76% respectively (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1984).

In 1976 about 78% of seniors expressed civic attitudes such as support for freedom of the press, rights of the accused to due process, rights of young people to influence government and school decisions, tolerance of racial and religious diversity, willingness to help others and to report vandalism (NAEP, September, 1978, pp. 29-37).

Students generally place more value on personal success than on civic concerns. When 12th graders were asked in 1982 about their goals, 85% or more considered "being successful in work," and "finding the right person to marry and having a happy life" to be very important, but "working to correct social and economic inequalities" was considered very important by only 12%, and "being a leader in my community" was considered very important by 8%. (National Opinion Research Center, 1983, pp. 8-121, 8-122).

A study of high school seniors in 1974 found more than 80% expressing warm positive feelings for the United States, more than 50% judged that the U.S. did better than other countries in six of eleven areas (e.g. educational opportunity, standard of living, etc.), more than 64% felt the government adequately guaranteed seven basic rights to

all citizens (e.g. equality, freedom of the press, non-discrimination, voting) and 82% expressed moderate to high levels of political trust (Sigel and Hoskin, 1981, Ch. 3).

2. Skills

Generally more than 60% of students correctly answer items dealing with the use of information in maps, tables, graphs, or an index. They can also identify appropriate questions to ask of political candidates and can choose statements that supply evidence to assertions (NAEP, Sept., 1978, pp. 19-23; NAEP, Oct., 1983, pp. 5-9). They have more difficulty with "higher-order" tasks such as describing the central problem being discussed by four speakers and identifying hypotheses that would be supported by data in a two-dimensional table. Writing exercises in the assessment of English led to the conclusion that "hardly any of the students showed evidence of having and using a systematic approach to the analytic tasks... these students wrote quick, easy answers,... produced responses that were fragmentary, superficial and cryptic; they did not go beyond this kind of response to closely analyze the texts or themselves as readers with opinions, interpretations and judgments" (NAEP, October, 1981, p. 23).

3. Knowledge

As would be expected, student knowledge varies substantially, depending upon the question. In 1980, most 17-year olds (88%) knew that slaves were considered property in the U.S. before 1865, but few (19%) knew that the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision affected education by ruling that separate schools for different races are inherently unequal. A majority knew which prominent governmental figures are elected and which appointed to office, but only 40% of the

17-year olds were aware that the Communist party can nominate a candidate for president of the U.S. (NAEP, Oct., 1983, p. 13). In 1976, over 70% correctly identified several constitutional rights, and 74% gave acceptable definitions of democracy.[2] A majority (62%) knew that the Supreme Court was the body that declares acts of Congress unconstitutional, but only 22% correctly identified the actions that Congress could take to stop a President from sending troops to fight in another country; i.e., refuse to provide money for further military action (NAEP, September, October, 1978).

4. Participation

In 1976, a slim majority of students expressed an interest in participating in civic life, 56% felt they could have any influence on decisions of local government; 47% felt they could influence the national government. When asked whether they would try to get an unjust Federal law changed, only 40% answered affirmatively with a specific course of action, and 41% answered, "yes, but I don't know what I could do." When asked what they would do if they saw several students fighting in a school hallway, only 38% would take any action to stop the fight (NAEP, March, October, 1978).

A complex model of political involvement developed by Sigel and Hoskin (1981, Ch. 6), took into account student participation in political, community and school activities, along with student cognition and affect. They estimated (Table 6.6, p. 171) that about 36% of high school seniors represent the interested, knowledgeable and active citizen, about 48% are apathetic and uninvolved ("spectator" and "passive citizen" types), and 16% are "mobilizable" citizens who

participate with rather low levels of knowledge in activities such as voting that require relatively little initiative.

This crude profile of students obscures countless exceptions to modal trends, along with differences between racial, socioeconomic, and gender groups, and between geographical regions. It gives no sense of the excitement and depth of commitment in students who do become fascinated with social inquiry and engaged in service or political action. It fails to describe the kinds of social critiques which students develop or their forms of coping with and resisting conventional social life. While incomplete, the profile does offer an outline of mainstream students.

D. Critiques

The presence of a dominant topical sequence, and a shared rhetoric about general goals gives an impression of consensus within the field. Yet U.S. social studies educators often speak about the lack of agreement within the field, and the social studies literature reflects diverse approaches. Social studies specialists dispute the relative emphasis that ought to be given to history, specific social science disciplines, global awareness, ethnic studies, critical thinking, moral reasoning, analysis of public controversy, democratic governance within the school, community-based learning. There may also be a fundamental division between those who press for precise, measurable, conceptions of social education and those who wish to construe the enterprise more as humanistic learning. A humanistic approach may be guided largely by narrative, metaphor, and analogy unique to each teacher's experience of the subject, rather than by a standard, predetermined set of concepts,

skills, or other student outcomes. In short, advocates within the field differ as to the worth of general approaches to social education as well as to the value of specific themes or courses.[3]

In addition to a variety of proposals for particular topics, four general curriculum rationales have critiqued mainstream curriculum in the last twenty years: social science inquiry (Morrissett and Stevens, 1971); critical thinking on public controversy (Oliver and Shaver, 1974); moral development (Kohlberg, 1981); and social action (Newmann, 1975). Each has articulated a theoretical rationale, has developed materials or specific programs for schools, and has been tried in the schools. The impact of each on the mainstream curriculum has been almost negligible, with social science inquiry having probably the most and social action the least influence.

These alternatives proposed substantial departures from classroom practice, and they failed to take root, but not because of their political radicalism--none of them directly challenged central assumptions of political-economic organization in the United States. Even the citizen action rationale which taught students to take assertive action to influence public policy was grounded in liberal political theory, emphasizing participatory democracy and consent of the governed.

The reform rationales in social studies did question conventional ways of packaging knowledge for students, and they asked teachers to engage students in more active forms of inquiry, where the process of reflection would be given more attention than mastery of particular knowledge products. In many ways, however, the curriculum projects were unresponsive to the perspectives and working environments of teachers.

Without offering broadly based programs of teacher education to inspire new visions of social education, they asked for professional commitments much at variance with teachers' previous training. In their zeal to promote reflective skills, they neglected the importance of mastery of content as a basis for reflection, for structure in learning, and for advancement in the credentialing system. The projects required increased preparation time for teachers and increased opportunities for teachers to respond to individual students' ideas, without altering time schedules in schools that already stretched teachers to their limit. Studies have shown that innovations unresponsive to such conditions in the schools are unlikely to be widely implemented (Haas, 1977; Berman and McLaughlin, 1978; Shaver et al, 1978; Hertzberg, 1981).

In contrast to the ferment stimulated by curriculum development efforts during the 1960's and early 1970's, the recent period has been quiet, some would say virtually dead. Special topics have been advocated continuously, but since Newmann (1975), I have seen only one attempt to develop a new rationale for the field, namely, the "social roles" approach presented by Superka and Hawke (1982).[4] This proposal was limited to a conceptual argument without ensuing development of materials. The apparent failures of earlier reform efforts have perhaps discouraged academics in social studies from further inquiry into alternative rationales.

Policy-makers and school officials in the U.S. are currently considering a host of reports which go beyond social studies to address general reform of schooling. The thrust of several reports is upon "higher standards" such as increased coursework, increased homework, increased standardized testing, reduction of electives and of vocational

education at the high school level. One report (Boyer, 1983) suggests revisions in required social studies courses at the high school level, but apart from this, none of the reports focuses particular attention on social studies. One of the reports (Sizer, 1984) calls for specific fundamental changes in the structure of instruction in high schools; two others (Adler, 1982; and Goodlad, 1983) also emphasize the goal of involving students more actively in reflective inquiry. Contemporary reports receiving wide publicity thus reflect both conservative attempts to strengthen traditional approaches to social education, and statements that advocate more progressive schooling.

Neither recent reports on U.S. educational reform, nor scholarship within the field of social studies offers much to provoke lively debate on the fundamentals of social education. An important literature related to social studies, though not focused upon it, has, however, blossomed. A radical perspective has gained increased attention in academia, and while it is not represented in the mainstream, its relevance to social studies demands that we consider it in some detail.

II. The Radical Perspective

I define the radical perspective as the set of propositions presented below. It is gleaned primarily from the writing of U.S. authors such as Cherryholmes (1980), Apple (1982), and Giroux (1983). Others (e.g., Anyon, 1979; Popkewitz, 1978; Whitty,) have also articulated some of the propositions in one form or another, and those who share this perspective often rely on Marxian thought and work of authors outside the U.S. such as Habermas, Gramsci, Friere, Bernstein, Young, Bordieu. My purpose is not a comprehensive literature review, nor careful scrutiny of any individual author. Rather, it is to

identify some themes which seem stressed in an increasingly visible network of discourse in U.S. journals and graduate study, and which offer, in my judgment, important challenges to the way in which U.S. citizens view social studies education.

This abbreviated synthesis may be challenged, for it does not include a full discussion of two important issues: selectivity and originality. I have obviously selected particular aspects of radical writing. I focus largely on writing about education and schooling, and make no attempt to analyze radical scholarship regarding more general social, economic and political issues. Within the work on schooling, I have selected ideas that seem to have implications for the deliberate planning of curriculum and instruction in schools. Neglected here are theories about hidden curriculum, or about society at large which suggest there is no point in attempting to affect schools until more fundamental structural changes occur (such theories offer no assistance in the task of school improvement.) I also rely primarily upon U.S. authors who attempt to speak somewhat directly to conditions within the U.S. I offer no discussion of historical or intellectual (disciplinary) contexts from which the selected propositions emerge. I risk creating a strawman, because authors give varying degrees of emphasis to different parts of the perspective, and some may even reject some of its propositions. In spite of these problems of selectivity, I explain below why such a synthesis is needed.

Those familiar with the history of U.S. education may find nothing new or unique in themes below considered "radical." In the U.S., the work of Dewey, Counts, or Rugg might be cited as offering intellectual roots for several of the ideas, and connections might also be drawn to

other work (some much earlier) in philosophy and social analysis. Curriculum reformers within the inquiry movement of the new social studies in the late 1960's may consider their efforts consistent with radical ideas, and so may workers in alternative schools, advocates of experiential education, and classroom teachers committed to the teaching of thinking. In short, I do not intend to trace the historical roots of these concepts, nor to suggest that each theme in the perspective has been developed originally by the authors cited. The major reason for calling attention to this work is my judgment that it offers a currently visible conception of social education distinct from commonly observed approaches, but which, for a variety of reasons, has not been adequately debated or developed.

Of course, there are risks in presenting an oversimplified rendition of radical thought, in possibly appropriating ideas for purposes not intended by authors and in neglecting the contextual development of these ideas in relation to other traditions such as American liberalism, progressivism or European radical thought. A parsimonious summary is necessary, however, if U.S. social educators are to consider radical work carefully. Scholars and practitioners often quickly dismiss the writing of individual radical authors because of mystifying jargon, excessively abstract and deterministic analyses, impractical or politically threatening proposals. Unfortunately, deficiencies of this sort in some of the writing tend to deflect attention from significant propositions that deserve careful analysis. It is in this spirit that I represent the work of a variety of authors as a set of propositions constituting a radical perspective on social education.

A. Main Propositions

The perspective includes propositions which promote a central social value or ideal, which describe the nature of social life, and which suggest strategies for improving education. Main propositions on these three matters are summarized as follows.

1. Emancipation, the social ideal. Much radical writing begins with the critique of social life presented below. The critique is usually not formally derived from a statement of preferred values or social ideals, but the central ideal can easily be inferred. If there is any single theme pervading these analyses, it is emancipation. The ultimate social ideal, and thus the purpose of education, ought to be the emancipation of all people such that none are subject to domination or exploitation by others economically, politically, sexually, intellectually, or spiritually.

2. Social life: dominant interests, autonomy, and contradiction. Schooling and teaching in social studies must be understood in terms of at least the following broad insights on the nature of social life.

a) Almost all policies and social practices tend to serve the interests of particular groups by violating or repressing the interests of others, especially minorities, the poor and women. Persistent patterns of domination are typically legitimated through subtle methods not apparent to those dominated, and even persons of dominant classes are victimized. The net result in most social structures, especially capitalistic ones, is injustice, alienation and dehumanization--in spite of aggregate increases over time in material standards of living and in personal choice for segments of the population.

b) Dominant interests, however, cannot entirely suppress the spirit of subordinated interests, because individuals and organizations always retain some measure of autonomy, some potential to resist and to force compromise upon dominant interests.

c) Social life involves a host of contradictions with which humans must deal; for example, the resistance of working class students to the dominant culture can further subordinate their own interests; oppressed groups may gain access and power, but then join the establishment in dominating others; vivid expressions of individuality may be generated by pressures for conformity to group pressure.

d) Knowledge itself is socially constructed and validated through human perception, guided by human purposes. Thus knowledge is constructed to serve human ends and its public use usually serves to legitimate dominant interests. Nevertheless, if the quest for knowledge is addressed to the understanding of contradictions and creative uses of conflict, it offers resources for emancipation.

3. Education strategies: social knowledge, practical skills, critical discourse. The responsibility of educators is to teach knowledge, skills and critical discourse that generate action toward emancipation. School programs and teaching procedures would seem to be guided by at least the following principles:

a) The knowledge to be taught should concentrate on ideas regarding social life mentioned in 2a-2d, emphasizing the significance of dominant interests, struggles for autonomy, contradictions and the social construction of knowledge. Such ideas should not, however, be foisted upon students and teachers through a centrally developed curriculum. They must be formulated in response to particular, local

circumstances through a process that connects teachers and students to their own cultural histories and that empowers them to define the curriculum.

b) Analytic understandings should be taught in conjunction with specific tools of literacy, numeracy, academic "basics," and interpersonal communication skills that build personal efficacy to act in the imperfect world-as-it-is. Such skills are needed for individual survival and development, but their mastery should be inspired by a commitment to work for a collectively emancipated world.

c) Teaching must be guided by continuous examination of one's own experiences, of "common sense," and of "expert" knowledge. Relationships must be created in which teachers and students can subject their fundamental beliefs to the scrutiny of one another and to a continuous process of dialectical revision. Such discourse creates new demands for knowledge itself in the quest to determine the nature of a better world and to arrive at guides for action.

This brief characterization simplifies a good deal of complicated analysis, but if we are to examine the radical perspective as a whole, such a summary will help. Assuming that these statements reflect major claims of recent radical educational thought relevant to social education, now consider the strengths of the perspective, and sources of resistance to it.

B. Strengths

This is not the place to defend the legitimacy of human emancipation in comparison to other values (e.g. world peace, divine salvation, personal growth), but a considerable literature, most of it in the Western tradition, would justify this as the social ideal which

education, social policy and knowledge itself ought to serve. Radical authors may disagree on the emphasis they give to individual liberty versus economic equality as criteria for defining emancipation. Both values are also supported in liberal democratic and ethical theory. I agree with critics such as MacPherson (1966) that emancipation as the pursuit of private economic interests became a tragic perversion of democratic philosophy, and that the pursuit of private economic interests prevents emancipation because it reinforces domination and exploitation. Radical writers understandably disassociate themselves from liberal political theory, but this intellectual tradition does contain the ethical imperatives needed to support a radical perspective, namely, equal entitlement to dignity and the centrality of liberty to that entitlement.

Radical propositions about social life offer helpful constructs for understanding society. The theme of domination is useful to clarify an agenda for emancipation, but also to inspire inquiry and curiosity in a more general sense. Since patterns of domination, special interests, techniques of legitimation are often subtle and invisible to an uncritical observer, they offer a persistent intellectual challenge, a constant invitation to discover and to demystify.

The theme of human agency and autonomy is powerful, because it represents a fundamental human aspiration and requirement for social justice. It also expresses the special concern of youth struggling to develop unique identities in spite of adults' efforts to socialize them into preconceived forms. Part of the struggle of youth is the more general, life-long problem of coping with contradiction and conflict (e.g. Must I tell the truth even if it hurts someone? To gain power

enough to change the system, I must first "make it," but that effort serves to perpetuate the system. Weapons of violence both prevent and cause it.) If students are to apply social education meaningfully to their lives, they must have an opportunity to study and deliberate upon contradictions, a central theme in radical interpretations of social life.

Finally, the radical perspective, directing close attention to the relationship between knowledge and values, candidly affirms a commitment to the particular social value which guides its own inquiry: human emancipation. This offers a more accurate interpretation of the social function of knowledge than does the interpretation of science as a value-neutral search for truth. In contrast to teaching that presents knowledge in the form of static authoritative truth, the radical conception of knowledge, itself a dynamic social phenomenon, is more likely to foster individual and social growth.

Compared to curriculum reformers in the mainstream, radical scholars have devoted relatively little effort to developing curriculum materials, specific teaching strategies, and staff development opportunities for infusing their ideas into social studies teaching in U.S. schools. Nevertheless, the emphasis on critical discourse has several advantages over the conventional "banking" approach in which teachers convey truth primarily in a one-way transmission process. By recognizing the development of knowledge and creation of meaning as an intersubjective experience, critical discourse enhances the human connection between teacher and learner. Rather than teacher as dispenser and student as receptor, both are engaged in a search, the success of which requires mutual adaptation to the other's social

constructs. Teachers and students are by no means intellectual equals (the teacher has tools that students must learn to use), but critical discourse requires each to suspend one's views sufficiently to allow the other to penetrate. In requiring a high degree of trust, critical discourse transforms learning into a cooperative activity among persons who genuinely need one another in order to enhance their knowledge and personal agency.

The concern for practical action guided by discourse defines learning as an active process in which the learner generates questions, challenges and tests claims, uses knowledge to produce effects in the world and to cope with ambiguity rather than to eliminate it. Educators throughout history have emphasized the importance of active learning in contrast to passive absorption of information, and the action-oriented spirit of radical writing is consistent with that progressive tradition.

Finally, the radical perspective would seem to avoid strategic mistakes of previous school reform efforts. Recognizing teachers' need for empowerment over their curriculum and pedagogy, radical strategy avoids the promulgation of centrally developed curriculum. Instead, the specific content of radical social studies must be developed in response to needs of local teachers and students. Radical groups publish teaching materials on sexism, prisons, or social class intended for national or international audiences, and they assist in the formation of broad support networks for radical teachers, but they do not advocate single programmatic solutions to curriculum improvement. This is politically intelligent both for its avoidance of suicidal confrontation, but more positively for its encouragement of local initiative and teacher empowerment.

Of course, the U.S. claims a long tradition of commitment to "local control" of education. Recent research on effective innovations similarly endorses the significance of local, school-based reform and teacher "ownership" of improvement efforts (Little, 1982; Popkewitz et al, 1982; Purkey and Smith, 1983). According to the radical perspective, however, working toward greater teacher control over curriculum and the nature of discourse in school cannot be achieved by focusing on life in schools alone. Because school life is so intimately connected with culture beyond school, patterns of domination in school are unlikely to change unless patterns in community beyond schools are also challenged. In this sense, reform within schools is viewed not as a search for technical or administrative solutions to "professional" problems, but as a broad political challenge requiring simultaneous work in school and community.

To summarize, impressive strengths of the radical perspective include the explicit connection of knowledge with the legitimate social purpose of human emancipation; several substantive concepts that probe more deeply into the nature of social life than does conventional curriculum; educational objectives that stress long-term social goals, immediate personal agency, and cooperative discourse; and an approach to reform that respects the culture of local teachers and students.

C. Resistance to the Radical Perspective

In spite of the strengths just summarized, considerable resistance to the radical perspective is well known. The perspective itself contains propositions that explain the opposition it encounters: specific interests in the U.S. (corporations, professional groups, religious organizations) find the perspective threatening to their

interests and will act to suppress it. The result is that, in spite of evidence to the contrary, popular faith is retained in meriotocracy, equal opportunity, technological progress and openness in the political system. Such beliefs cannot be dismissed as false consciousness. Personal experience and other evidence confirms, for many persons, a sanguine view of the U.S. economic-political system. There are observable differences in the nature and extent of domination-exploitation in different societies, and those who compare societies' standards of material well-being and opportunities for political and expressive freedom may find a radical perspective more or less useful, depending upon the social context. When many believe that comparatively high levels of emancipation have already been achieved in a society, interest in the radical view is dampened.

The failure of the radical perspective to take root either in U.S. politics or education, however, can also be attributed in part to weaknesses in the perspective itself; i.e., its inadequate response to important human concerns. Among educators, much resistance seems to flow from objections to its ideological substance, its neglect of organizational constraints on teaching and its relative silence about pedagogy for dealing with ambiguity, contradiction, and criticism. These problems represent challenges to the radical perspective that can reasonably be made even by persons who subscribe to its central propositions.

Ideological Substance. Rationales for social studies education based on liberal theory have been criticized for their failure to support fundamental social criticism or to articulate a substantive vision of the good society, beyond a vague pluralism of individuals and

groups free to pursue private interests without getting in one another's way (Stanley, 1981). Through its concern for liberty and democratic procedures for regulating conflict, liberal theory holds up the hope of minimizing the domination of some people by others. Radical studies have exposed the persistence of domination and exploitative relationships even within democracies supporting constitutional liberties, collective bargaining and populist political reforms. Both liberal and radical theory have been criticized for holding up a naieve hope that social domination can be eliminated. All societies and their sub-groups perpetuate dominant norms, positions, offices, to which people must conform, but many of these can be defended as necessary for that degree of order in social life necessary to the dignity of participants. From this point of view, relations of "domination" must be expected; the challenge is to fashion them in the most just forms or in the ways that enhance human dignity (emancipation).

What particular social structures are most likely to accomplish this? The radical perspective in education seems to assume democratic socialism as an ultimate goal, but the specific outlines of that social order usually remain vague. How centralized or decentralized will government be? What forms of private property and private financial gain will be acceptable? What levels of status or privilege will differentiate people from one another? What levels of personal choice will be available in career, consumption patterns, or child rearing? To the extent that the laudable goals of equality and emancipation remain unconnected to specific policy proposals, the social vision of the radical perspective is considered to offer no meaningful alternative.

Further, the perspective contains a number of contradictions that cast doubt on its usefulness. How can certain interests dominate and exploit, but at the same time be expected to yield to groups that challenge their own hegemony? How can one maintain critical discourse into one's own perspectives, but at the same time engage in committed action for emancipation (shouldn't that value also be questioned)? How can one at once show respect for a person's view of the world and also raise consciousness that may traumatically undermine that view? Perhaps contradictions of this sort can be resolved by radical theory, but until they are, the perspective can be considered weakened by internal contradictions.

Organizational Contraints on Teachers. Several aspects of teachers' work make it difficult to offer a critical social education. Teachers are responsible for large numbers of students and can spend very little time responding to individual work in a sustained way.[5] For managerial reasons, certain instructional activities prevail (e.g. lectures, films, silent seatwork, short-answer objective tests, discussions requiring short verbal responses). Activities more conducive to critical inquiry present cumbersome logistical problems (e.g. discussions soliciting lengthy student responses, one-to-one dialogues between teacher and student, small group projects). The teaching load offers few opportunities for teachers to reflect upon their work collaboratively and to build their own curriculum. Teachers must plan instruction to fit a credentialing system (testing and grading) that produces rank comparisons between students, and there is increased pressure to make curriculum common between schools so that student mastery of standard content across the nation can be assessed.

The credentialing system is built on a conception of knowledge as certain and conclusive: one demonstrates knowledge by producing right instead of wrong answers. Radical education, which assumes significant areas of knowledge to be problemmatic and tentative, cannot be easily incorporated into the conventional credentialing system. Finally, and perhaps most obvious, the teacher, as an employee of a particular political entity (a school board supported by the state) will be at risk in teaching students to evaluate critically the legitimacy of that entity. The teacher's dependence upon the employing organization thus constrains the arenas to which critical social thought may be applied.

Tolerance for ambiguity-contradiction and criticism. Human resistance to radical teaching can be attributed to organizational aspects of schooling and to personal insecurity generated in capitalist structures where people must often compete against one another rather than cooperate in trusting relationships. Even within social organizations that promote a high degree of trust and cooperation, however, there are limits to the degree of ambiguity, contradiction, and criticism which humans find constructive or even tolerable. In the most supportive settings, humans have great difficulty subjecting their own beliefs to continuous scrutiny, difficulty in resolving ambiguity and contradiction, difficulty in sustaining interest in abstract issues of social justice, especially when criticism highlights negative features in the human condition. In short, the process of critical discourse for many people is likely to involve a painful struggle, not an immediate sense of joy, growth or positive accomplishment. Given such psychological limitations in the way we respond to ambiguity, contradiction, and social criticism, it is not surprising that teachers

often emphasize consensus over conflict, certainty over ambiguity, and a hopeful, positive view of social life.

Having summarized central propositions, strengths, and sources of resistance to the radical perspective, now let us pursue in more detail the kind of intellectual work that must be done to address weaknesses in the perspective so that social studies education might benefit from its strengths.

III. Bridging the Gulf

If the gulf between mainstream academics and social studies teachers is as wide as several observers have noted (Shaver, et al., 1978; Mehlinger, 1981), the gulf between teachers and radical academics may be even wider, because the radical perspective seems to demand a fundamental shift in conventional views of social life and of learning. This gulf between academics and school teachers can be expected to persist so long as organizational structures within which they work hold neither group accountable for serving the other's interests (each can attain success in their own domain without responding seriously to the concerns of the other domain). Without discussing here organizational reforms for bridging the gap between academics and teachers, I shall attempt the more modest task of suggesting forms of intellectual work and research that seem necessary to resolve legitimate concerns that mainstream educators have with the radical perspective. This agenda addresses each source of resistance just discussed.

A. The social ideals and the critique of social life must be refined to convey a more coherent vision of the social alternatives to be pursued and more persuasive arguments to justify the apparent

benefits of radical social change in relation to apparent costs. The need to elaborate preferred forms of democratic socialism and to respond to apparent contradictions within the perspective have already been cited. Scholarly work should also help to clarify conceptions of emancipation such as individual freedom, collective self-determination and the expression of individuality guided by the contraints of collective purpose (as well as discussion of which contraints are most justifiable). It should attempt to reconcile the need for local empowerment and decentralized authority with the facts of global interdependence and the imperative to work for certain universal ideals (e.g. economic equality) which can conflict with local empowerment. Economic analysis and policy argument is needed to show how particular policies or reorganized institutions could be expected to accomplish many goals simultaneously; for example, more equitable distribution of wealth, increased productivity, decreased worker alienation, reduction of threats to peace and to the environment. Scholarly work on such unfinished aspects of radical social ideology is critical if the perspective is to attract broader interest. It may be inappropriate to expect educationist academics to undertake this work, but they could help to convey the work of policy theorists who tackle these issues.

B. We must study how the structures of schooling might be revised to permit the kind of interaction among teachers and students which radical teaching demands. Radical interpretations of social life can, of course, be taught through the traditional text and lecture format to large groups of students required to recapitulate the transmitted content on standardized tests. If used exclusively, however, such methods violate the principle of critical discourse. The development of

understanding through critical discourse would seem to require much different conditions of teaching.

If students are to be active learners, critically examining problems of social life, dealing seriously with ambiguity, conflict and contradiction, at a minimum they require opportunities to express themselves frequently (orally and in writing) and to receive prompt, detailed feedback on their views. They must have an opportunity to pursue topics in depth and complexity, rather than being pressured to master superficial surveys of many topics. To engage in honest critiques of one another's ideas, they must learn within an atmosphere of cooperation and trust, not competition and individual isolation. If students are to take the process of schooling seriously (as opposed to mechanistically meeting its demands), schools must minimize student alienation; for example, by offering opportunities for student choice in school work, by cultivating consensus among faculty and students on the central purposes of the school; by integrating various aspects of schoolwork (Newmann, 1981). Building school cultures of this sort would require substantial changes in mainstream schooling (e.g., much less emphasis on standardized testing; much more time for collaborative teacher planning). Which particular changes seem most necessary to implement the radical perspective, and how might they be developed?

C. Apart from organizational issues such as course requirements, teachers' time to work with individual students, testing and credentialing systems, we must address questions of pedagogy, and try to identify the kinds of teaching that constructively guide our encounters with ambiguity, contradiction, and criticism. We need more knowledge on at least two problems: a) What teaching strategies and

classroom norms will build sufficient trust among students and teachers so that they will authentically risk themselves in discussions of social life? b) What teaching strategies can guide critical discourse so as to minimize frustration and maximize a sense of positive intellectual accomplishment leading to constructive action?

For years, social studies educators have called for the teaching of critical thinking, but without developing a pedagogy for building the foundation of interpersonal trust on which such inquiry must rest. Critical discourse must focus relentlessly on exposing our errors in perception, our lack of knowledge, our failures in logic, and other inadequacies in our understanding of social life. We learn in part only by exposing our inadequacies, so that they may be corrected. Because it is often personally threatening to expose oneself to such scrutiny, we refrain from risking ourselves in this way (and many educators often respect our vulnerability by not demanding it of us). As a result of this negotiated agreement between student and teacher not to risk oneself, very little learning, in the radical sense, ever occurs.

We could benefit from description of specific classroom practices showing teachers giving critical feedback that enhances, rather than diminishes the dignity of students. Approaches to coaching and socratic teaching (see Adler, 1982; Sizer 1984), to cooperative learning (see Johnson et al. 1981; Slavin, 1983), and to other forms of student empowerment within the classroom (e.g., Schor, 1980) should be studied not only for their effect on student mastery of subject matter, but most importantly for their contribution to a climate of discussion in which participants feel secure enough to submit their ideas for serious critique.

A climate of open sharing is necessary, but not sufficient. The products or outcomes of that sharing must represent to students and to teachers constructive intellectual accomplishment. At one extreme, rigorous social inquiry can accentuate a perception of conflict and persistent negative appraisal: history becomes a continuous tale of exploitation and unjustice, punctuated by a host of tragic human clashes. Careful thought about solutions to such problems often magnifies a sense of complexity and ambiguity regarding the facts of social life, legitimate ideals, and constructive courses of action. Such outcomes of critical inquiry can lead to student frustration, cyncism, nihilism, and moral relativism which inhibit both further inquiry and purposeful social action. In contrast, teaching which conveys knowledge about social life as authoritative and which presents an essentially positive assessment (through a beneficient view of social institutions and praise of human progress) avoids these problems.

Research should help identify teaching practices which show students that radical inquiry can have personally and socially rewarding consequences. Rewards may result from teacher and peer praise for individual progress in articulating a more defensible position on a controversial problem, from creating a concrete product (a publication or a broadcast) or from using inquiry to exert influence in some area of public life. Literature on experiential education suggests guidelines for student activities to enhance motivation and sense of accomplishment, but there is virtually no scholarly work on pedagogy to maximize the rewards of problemmatic social inquiry.[6]

The frustrations of problemmatic inquiry visit themselves upon teachers as well as students. In spite of much rhetoric about the need

to teach thinking skills, research on teaching offers few clues on how to do this successfully. In the absence of clear pedagogies that have proven effective in the teaching of critical thought, teachers understandably direct efforts toward instructional ends over which they feel more command. Thus, teachers' sense of professional worth is built largely upon a conception of self as master of a subject, having good rapport with students, not as a skilled socratic investigator committed to clarifying the nature of what we do not know as a way of understanding what we do know. If the teacher's sense of professional competence rests primarily in transmitting certainties about social life to students, the teacher trying to conduct critical discourse may feel not only intellectually lost, but even deprived of the opportunity to contribute his/her own professional assets. Research is needed on ways of making problemmatic inquiry rewarding to teachers who have previously depended upon more authoritative ways of expressing their competence.

By accentuating the need for intellectual work in these areas I do not intend to minimize the substantial political obstacles which a radical perspective on social education must confront. Even if some of this research is fruitfully pursued, groups with political and economic clout, well-organized to suppress radical approaches to social education are likely to reject their intrusion into the mainstream. In this sense, political organization and action demand as much attention as research. In my view, however, a substantial portion of resistance comes not from doctrinaire opponents of critical thought or of socialism, but from persons who actually subscribe to general radical propositions, yet who have understandable difficulty implementing them

for the reasons discussed. To the extent that research helps to resolve some of the these issues, it will facilitate the engagement of these educators.

I think a radical perspective offers great promise for conducting social education to serve human dignity and justice. But if radical educational scholarship is to build on the strengths of its central propositions, and to be taken seriously by mainstream academics and practitioners, it must respond to issues raised here. Directing scholarship to bridge the gap with mainstream teachers, however, is not simply the responsibility of radical writers in education. Other academics should join in this task.

The cry for educational reform is out in the U.S. Lip-service is given to the development of reasoning skills, but most emphasis is placed upon mastery of content in the main disciplines through increased course requirements and increased testing of students. Progressive educators have critiqued these trends; Adler (1982), Goodlad (1983), and Sizer (1984), for example, emphasize the teaching of critical thought. Nevertheless, if reform is enacted in response to many of the other commission reports, it will proceed in a conservative, even repressive (because of lack of attention to equity for disadvantaged students), direction.

Radical and progressive educators may differ in their social analyses, but their common concern for critical social inquiry would seem to require significant changes in the way teachers' work is organized and changes in pedagogy that several current reform reports either neglect or oppose. Unfortunately, neither radicals nor progressives have developed adequate responses to issues of school

organization and pedagogy raised here. Unless academics devote scholarly attention to problems such as these, we shall offer only impotent challenges to mainstream reform, now in the process of further solidifying historically persistent, regressive forms of social education.

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Footnotes

[1]I rely extensively here upon the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Due to lack of data about some areas of the curriculum (e.g., family, neighborhood, local community, critical thinking about social problems), to lack of detailed summaries of student learning in some areas that have been tested (e.g., history, geography, economics), and mostly to lack of space in this manuscript, I can offer only a sketchy profile of student performance in selected areas. Because data from the 1981-82 assessment has not been reported in depth, these findings are selected largely from the 1976 assessment. A brief report on the 1981-82 assessment gives evidence consistent with 1976 findings, and observes a general increase in student performance of 2-3% (National Assessment of Educational Progress, October, 1983). Although data was collected on 9, 13, and 17-year olds, most of this profile refers to the oldest group, high school seniors.

[2]With a different sample Sigel and Hoskin (1981, p. 116) found that 5% gave no definition, 9% gave a wrong definition, 44% were scored as simplistic, 25% more complex, and 16% sophisticated.

[3]For descriptions of alternative approaches to social studies in America, see Barr, Barth and Shermis (1978); Mehlinger and Davis (1981); Morrissett and Haas (1982).

[4]Butts (1980) offered a thoughtful analysis of the history of citizenship education in the U.S. and a rationale for a conception of citizenship of pluralism within national unity, but this reaffirmed previous democratic conceptions of polity and citizenship, emphasizing the significance of public good over private interests.

[5]Sizer (1984) describes how a high school English teacher can allocate only about five minutes per week to the analysis of each student's writing.

[6]Some efforts along these lines were made when Newmann and Oliver (1970) addressed problems in the teaching of public controversy in classrooms, and when Newmann (1975, 1977) addressed ways of responding to the frustrations of social action.